

# INSTRUCT-O-GRAM

## THE HANDS-ON TRAINING GUIDE FOR THE FIRE INSTRUCTOR

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### **Conducting Effective Disaster Drills**

#### **TASK**

The task at hand is at best a difficult one. Just how do you prepare for the unknown? Disaster response doesn't come with a blueprint to follow. Even with yearly disaster drills, how well will your personnel do? In this *Instruct-O-Gram*, we will consider a systematic sequence of steps that will help your next disaster drill be more educational to all parties involved.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

After completion of this lesson personnel should be able to:

- Identify key agencies that should be involved in the planning process.
- 2. Identify the types of exercises that can be utilized for a disaster drill.
- 3. Identify the 18 steps in development of a disaster drill.

#### **INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS**

- 1. Previous disaster drill notes or summaries.
- 2. Various disaster drill plans from your department and other agencies.
- 3. Simulation software products or tabletop props.

#### **TEACHING TIME**

Teaching time will vary in each individual training session. Variables that will dictate longer times are inexperience in developing disaster drills or participation in these style drills. A second variable that will effect teaching time is the knowledge and experience of providers when it comes to di-

saster operations. This is a crucial training session that need not be rushed. Take as much time as needed.

#### **MOTIVATING THE STUDENT**

Disaster drills are the only real way to functionally test our capabilities to handle the "real deal." On-the-job training taking place in the middle of a disaster could become a disaster in itself. The primary goal of any disaster drill is to improve operations, decision-making, planning, and management skills of personnel. In everyday life we do not respond to enough real disasters to become proficient in our skills. Disasters like 9/11 demonstrate the need for readiness at all times. Preparing for the "what ifs" is an integral part of our business. So why are we hesitant to do so?

#### **PRESENTATION**

#### I. So where do I start the planning process?

- A. Define Goals and Objectives
  - 1. What is it that you are trying to simulate? One of the first concepts that needs to be identified is the realism of the disaster event. By realism we are considering the likelihood that an event of this nature could occur in your district. This is an area to be careful with. Make sure you keep an open mind in this area.
  - 2. Make the objectives obtainable. Objectives are easily written down during planning, however what are the chances they can be met? Realism is a philosophy that must be prevalent in your planning of these drills.

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- B. What type of functions do you want to exercise?
  - 1. The concept of a full disaster drill is not one that can be done with maximum results the first time you perform this training. There are many variables and areas that need to be practiced. Pick selected areas and test them.
  - 2. Understand that you are testing the emergency management capabilities primarily, and the emergency action or responses secondarily. Most times companies or crews can execute specific tasks well. It is the management of multiple personnel doing multiple tasks in an environment that is closely similar to the "real deal" that will accomplish the goals of the operation.
  - 3. Performance areas to be concerned with.
    - a. Interagency cooperation
    - b. Negotiation
    - c. Command and control
    - d. Coordination
    - e. Resource adequacy
    - f. Communications
    - g. Policy-making
    - h. Resource allocation

#### II. Planning Committee

#### A. Members

- 1. Department chief and senior staff including the training officer
- 2. Emergency management representatives
- 3. Airport Board representatives
- 4. Civil/municipal agencies
  - Public works
  - Maintenance staff
- 5. Hospital representatives
- 6. Private industry
- 7. News media
- B. Keep the Committee small but workable.
  - ◆ If you keep the concepts of unified command in mind you will be successful working with the size and attendees of the planning committee. This is important since for the entire operation to be efficient each division must be able to work and perform proficiently both individually and together.
- C. Committee Responsibilities
  - 1. Timetable for completion of the drill
  - 2. Date/time /location of the drill
  - 3. Type of disaster and magnitude
  - 4. Selection and preparation of site

- 5. Selection and preparation of victims
- 6. Selection of "official observers/evaluators"
  - ♦ This is a crucial piece to complete the puzzle. The observers or evaluators must have a strong knowledge in the area they are working with. (These should be experts or leaders in the field) It is imperative that individuals working in this capacity be totally honest in their evaluation. They are there to help you improve through the recognition of errors and problems during the drill.
- 7. Working with the news media
  - We often shun away from the media in everyday responses. The media can be your friend. They can be a key portion of the drill if you are testing notification skills to the general public. That's right the media can be part of your operational plan. It is important that they exercise their capabilities as well as just covering the news. They can also be utilized to show the response from a working end captured on tape.
- 8. Resource planning
  - ◆ Just when you thought you had covered all of the bases you find you have a gap that must be filled immediately. By working through these drills areas of needed resources can be identified and planned for in the future.
- D. Assess the needs and capabilities of your jurisdiction.
  - 1. Each jurisdiction has limited capabilities based upon it's size, personnel, equipment and training. The important factor in this case is to know where you can get these resources if needed. The assessment of your needs will help you decide what resources are required. It is impossible to plan for every event so a wide view needs assessment should be performed.

#### III. Select the Type of Exercise

- A. Simulation Exercises
  - Simulation is a good way to help with needs assessment, personnel requirements and to practice working together.
  - 1. Orientation Seminar
    - This portion is done in the beginning phases or as a leadership exercise. It is to help the planners become familiar with each other and the disaster plan (if one has been developed).
    - ♦ If the disaster plan has not been

completed it is a way to work hand-inhand in developing a comprehensive disaster plan the will be able to foster interagency cooperation and unified command.

#### 2. Discussion Seminar

An exercise that works with group dynamics through in-depth discussion to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the disaster plan. This is a problemsolving exercise that should help solidify the disaster plan in the end.

#### 3. Tabletop/Simulation Seminar

◆ Tabletop or simulation exercises test the decision-making process of the group and individual participants. Run this exercise using the Command Post and the Emergency Operation Center to evaluate the function and the capabilities of each agency or group involved. Remember to make the simulation as realistic as possible for your jurisdiction.

#### B. Simulation Exercises

1. The use of simulators or tabletops can now be expanded out to the next level...the supervisors of the response personnel. This will also test decision-making skills of these individuals but will add a new dynamic portion of training to management personnel who are working from the Emergency Operations Center. It is one thing to say we would do something from the Operations Center but the time and energy needed to accomplish it in the field is another story. This begins to add realism to the concepts of the disaster drill and the disaster response plan.

#### C. Emergency Operations Simulation

1. An emergency operations simulation exercise is the way to test the capabilities of the emergency plan and the emergency managers by simulating an environment as close to the actual situation as possible. The exercise uses only the resources for the management function and the actual carrying out of the plan of coordination. This means that we will be working as close to the real incident as possible without it having occurred.

#### IV. Steps in Developing a Disaster Drill

Step 1

Determine the need for the disaster exercise and at what level to begin.

#### Step 2

Determine the projected costs and liabilities.

#### Step 3

After you have identified the type of exercise, set primary goals and made projections of the cost, your next step is to gain approval from your jurisdiction and each agency that would be involved.

This is a political portion and must be handle appropriately without causing problems by over stepping perceived or actual boundaries.

#### Step 4

Organize the disaster planning committee.

#### Step 5

Develop, establish, assess and refine your goals and objectives.

#### Step 6

Develop the scenario.

#### Step 7

Set a timetable for completion of specific coordination functions of the planning process.

#### Step 8

If simulated messages are going to be used as in a tabletop exercise, prepare the specific problems that will be posed to individuals and/or agencies. If an emergency operations simulation is going to be used, additional preparation must be made to make the site be as real as possible with the regular problems that may be faced.

#### Step 9

Schedule regular meetings with the committee for briefings and status reports regarding progress of the planning process.

#### Step 10

Solicit support from each agency that will be involved.

#### Step 11

Supply each agency involved in the drill with an exercise control package. This package should have all the necessary information in it to help the managers and response personnel be able to work in a proficient manner.

#### Step 12

Ready the facility or site where the exercise is going to occur.

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Step 13

Develop a checklist for the briefing of all personnel who will participate in the drill.

Step 14

Select an evaluation committee.

Step 15

Arrange for back-up protection for the units that will be out of service participating in the drill.

Step 16

Conduct the exercise. (On time)

Step 17

Clean up, put up and get back in service Step 18

Evaluate or critique the incident.

Critiques may be made at various levels of involvement and/or agencies to address issues at those levels. However, there should be a complete critique with everyone involved (if possible).

#### V. Evaluation of Disaster Drills

Every disaster drill, no matter the type or magnitude, produces positive results, which can be used to enhance our disaster management programs. Every effort must be made to gather honest, constructive evaluations from all who participated in, observed, or controlled the drill. The focus should be on the emergency plan, not such things as how good the victims looked, etc. A constructive critique session will provide positive feedback and valuable information on the performance of the disaster managers, staff, responders, and the plan itself. The plan is the key to a successfully mitigated disaster. Without pre-set information and guidelines for responses to disaster, we would be working from ground zero to formulate a plan.

It is extremely important that information about the exercise be distributed to all persons involved as well as the management and executives of the jurisdiction.

#### **SUMMARY**

One single exercise does not dramatically increase the readiness of a jurisdiction to effectively handle a disaster situation. It takes an on-going program with a commitment to disaster planning and exercising to generate its highest yields. An exercise is just the beginning. Disaster planning is a dynamic process that is on-going and does not have an end; only new beginnings. Each disaster manager should have long-range goals that are specific and based on needs assessments.

Use the recommendations from the exercises to evaluate and identify possible improvements in the disaster planning process. Keep the plan updated and active for all personnel, agencies and the community.

Remember to plan well, conduct realistic disaster training sessions and critique your efforts to enhance your performance should the "real deal" occur.

#### RESOURCES

Instruct-O-Gram, Larry Williams, ISFSI, November 1989.

CRB: What Disaster Response Management Can Learn from Chaos Theory, Gus A. Kochler, May 1995.

<u>Community Emergency Response Teams</u>, Federal Emergency Management Agency.

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